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ABSTRACT

This booklet on progressive education contains the profiles of three extraordinary progressive experiments in three very different types of schools. The first is the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago between 1896 and 1904, which was established specifically to test out in practice certain philosophical and psychological principles of John Dewey. The second school profiled is the City and Country School in New York City founded by Caroline Pratt. Pratt's philosophical orientation exemplified the romantic strain of progressive education. Her approach was reminiscent of Rousseau and her clientele were the children of the spirited intelligentsia who gathered in Manhattan's Greenwich Village in the early 20th century. The last is the Holtville School in Alabama, which was an internationally famous progressive institution in the 1930s and 1940s. The program at Holtville exemplified the vocational and life-adjustment dimensions of the progressive education movement. The school's program was truly innovative. Somewhat ironically, this school served an economically deprived area within a staunchly conservative and rural community. (Author/RM)

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Progressive Education: Lessons from Three Schools

By William Burt Lauderdale

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Series Editor, Derek L. Burseson

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Introduction

In celebration of its Diamond Jubilee, it is most fitting that Phi Delta Kappa publish a fastback on progressive education since it reflects a commitment to the belief that worthy ideas of the past should not be lost to contemporary thought.

Progressive education had much to offer in the way of worthy ideas and much to say about how those ideas might be used in educational practice. As an educational movement, progressivism generated school programs that were extraordinarily innovative. As is the case with any philosophical movement that attempts to alter longstanding thought, belief, and value systems, there was no shortage of problems and no lack of critics.

One of the most troubling problems encountered by the movement was the lack of clarity—among critics and supporters alike—regarding the very meaning of progressive education. In his study of progressivism in American education Lawrence Cremin noted in *The Transformation of the School* that "... the movement was marked from the very beginning by a pluralistic, frequently contradictory character." Furthermore, he maintained that no capsule definition of progressive education exists and that "... none ever will; for throughout its history progressive education meant different things to different people, and these differences were only compounded by the remarkable diversity of American Education."¹

More serious than the lack of a clear identity was the fact that the principles and practices that came under the rubric of progressive education were so broad that the movement was vulnerable to irresponsible criticism. Critics frequently identified the most bizarre practices of

radical progressives as representative of the movement, thus undermining the serious efforts of the much more numerous moderate progressives. However, this is not to deny that there was substantial, legitimate, and incisive criticism from respected educational conservatives who stood outside the movement as well as from friends of progressive education who worked within the movement.

Problems aside, progressive education flourished nationwide and influenced in a fundamental way our thinking about educating young people. Progressivism was at once a reaction against traditional education and a positive force for change. While there was great diversity within the movement, progressives of every shade shared important commitments. George Counts has given us a succinct description of those commitments that bound together progressives as a group.

They have focused attention squarely upon the child; they have recognized the fundamental importance of the interest of the learner; they have defended the thesis that activity lies at the root of all true education; they have conceived learning in terms of life situations and growth of character; they have championed the rights of the child as a free personality.²

One method of sampling the fundamental commitments and rich diversities within progressivism is to examine its ideology in educational practice. What follows are profiles of three extraordinary progressive experiments in three very different types of schools.

The first is the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago between 1896 and 1904, which was established specifically to test out in practice certain philosophical and psychological principles of John Dewey. The reader will be struck by the care and rigor with which the Laboratory School attempted to reflect in practice some rather complex theoretical commitments. The second school profiled is the City and Country School in New York City founded by Caroline Pratt. Pratt's philosophical orientation exemplified the romantic strain of progressive education. Her approach was reminiscent of Rousseau and her clientele were the children of the spirited intelligentsia who gathered in Manhattan's Greenwich Village in the early twentieth century. The last is the Holtville School in Alabama, which was an internationally famous progressive institution in the 1930s and 1940s. The program at

Holville exemplified the vocational and life-adjustment dimensions of the progressive education movement. This school's program was truly innovative. Somewhat ironically, this school served an economically deprived area within a staunchly conservative and rural community.

The three schools profiled in this fastback warrant our attention, for they represent the best of a movement whose source of inspiration was the concern for the well-being of young people.

The Laboratory School (1896-1904)

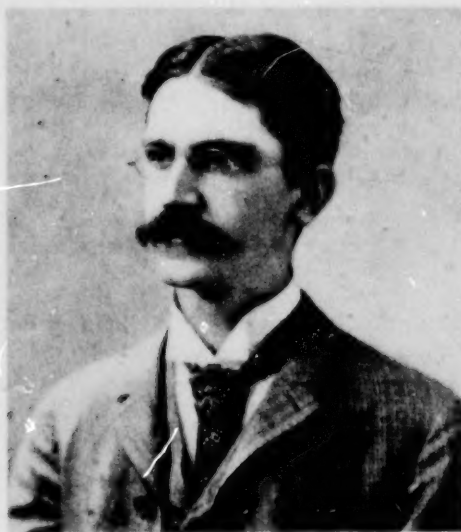
In 1896 at the age of 37, John Dewey had already been head of the Departments of Philosophy, Psychology, and Pedagogy at the University of Chicago for two years. Several years of high school teaching, earning a doctorate in philosophy from Johns Hopkins University, and serving ten years on the faculty at the University of Michigan preceded the Chicago appointment. By this time he had published over 50 articles, numerous reviews and syllabi, and had authored or co-authored four books. A conservative bibliography of his writings completed before his death in 1952 filled 153 pages.⁵ His intellectual impact was to be felt in a substantial way in the areas of psychology, logic, ethics, aesthetics, religion, social and political thought, and education. John Dewey would come to be regarded internationally as one of the most important philosophers in twentieth-century Western thought. While his work was in many areas of intellectual thought, it would be difficult to overestimate his contributions to the establishment of education as a legitimate area of academic study.

That Dewey would be interested in establishing a school supervised by a university faculty is not really surprising. His concerns about matters of education were neither impersonal nor incidental. Besides having taught at the high school level, he had been a member of secondary school program assessment teams while on the faculty at the University of Michigan. His friend and colleague, George Mead, noted that including the Department of Pedagogy as a part of Dewey's University of Chicago responsibilities was a critical factor in drawing him away from the University of Michigan.⁶ Ultimately, it was not only the

new university but also the very character of the city of Chicago that substantially influenced Dewey's thoughts on education.

Dewey had grown up in what one could regard as an idyllic American setting—late nineteenth-century Burlington, Vermont. His father, a shopkeeper, was a cultivated man of good humor, who provided a pleasant and secure existence for his family. John's mother was intelligent and well-read; and her work with the underprivileged of Burlington earned her a reputation as a person of considerable compassion. For John, there were comfortable neighborhood interactions as well as exciting explorations of surrounding woods and waterways. For the most part, life was quiet, orderly, and relatively uncomplicated.

When Dewey moved to Chicago, the residents of that city numbered over one million, and a plant like the McCormick Reaper Works employed more people than had lived in the entire city just 50 years earlier. In *Altgeld's America*, Ray Ginger portrayed accurately and poetically



Source: *The Dewey School*

John Dewey, about 1890

the city that had grown too fast and with a narrowness of purpose that focused on making money. The wealthy few lived in mansions of questionable architectural taste, while the masses lived in ugly slums. A substantial portion of the population had been peasants in Europe; in Chicago they barely eked out a living while contributing to the fortunes of such eminent business tycoons as Marshall Field and Gustavus Swift. It was a time, as Tinker noted, when 10-year-old children worked in factories with their parents in order to help the family survive, while Field spent \$75,000 on a birthday party for his son.² Chicago politics were corrupt, and the air above it and the waters around it were already polluted.

An understanding of the principles underlying the Laboratory School requires a certain appreciation for the juxtaposition of Burlington and Chicago in the personal experience of John Dewey. If education were to benefit young people within the context of sweeping industrialization and urbanization, Dewey understood well that there would have to be a radical departure from the traditional formal studies that were meant to *supplement* the enculturation process that came so naturally to those living in a Burlington-type environment. In those small towns, where young people understood clearly the economics of family life and the social and political arrangements that gave an orderly structure to community life, the schools carried no serious burden in the way of integrating individuals into society.

By contrast, in America's cities at the time immigration, industrialization, urbanization, and occupational specialization created a swiftly changing and complex society that tended to fragment rather than unify experience, to alienate people rather than integrate them into productive social arrangements. There was an urgent need for a radical revision of the school's role in socialization and for new approaches to instruction that could prepare young people to lead effective lives in a constantly changing environment. A sensitivity to those needs inspired the establishment of the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago.

The alliance between the University of Chicago and the Laboratory School was clearly not intended to satisfy any narrow utilitarian purposes. It was not Dewey's aim to establish "a normal school for the

training of teachers, not [to provide] a model school offering specific answers to the immediate problems of the public schools."⁶ Rather, he wanted the school to "bear the same relation to the work in pedagogy that a laboratory bears to biology, physics, or chemistry."⁷ One fortunate dimension of Dewey's Chicago experiment was that he had already attracted substantial recognition in the academic community with some extraordinary psychological and philosophical principles as they related to human learning and to the development of human potential. The Laboratory School was intended to test those principles in educational practice.

Organization and Administration

I am afraid we have not [the desks] you want. You want something at which the children may work; these are all for listening.*

A dealer in school supplies addressing John Dewey

Designing suitable desks for his Laboratory School pupils was hardly the most serious problem posed for Dewey. Obtaining financing for materials and adequate facilities was a continuing source of



Source: *The Dewey School*

The Laboratory School was first housed in the Ellis Avenue residence

concern throughout most of the period of the school experiment. Initially, the University of Chicago provided only tuition grants for the graduate students who were to teach in the Laboratory School. All other monies were obtained through gifts from friends or from the very reasonable tuition fees charged parents of the children enrolled.

The opening of the school in January 1896 was hardly auspicious. The school itself was a private dwelling that served 16 students under the supervision of two adults. The reopening of the school in the fall required a new residence to house the now 32 children and seven full- and part-time faculty. A third move occurred in January 1897; but by December of that year, the 16 teachers and 60 students moved to an impressive house on Ellis Avenue in Chicago. Eventually there would be 23 faculty, 10 graduate teaching assistants and 110 children, ranging in ages from four to 15. Except for the final year of 1903-04, when the Laboratory School was housed in the University of Chicago School of Education building, the Ellis Avenue residence served as quarters for the experiment.

As the numbers of people directly involved in the project increased, the need for some formalized organizational structure became apparent. John Dewey served as director of the Laboratory School, and the supervisor of instruction was Ella Flagg Young, who would later serve as Chicago's first woman superintendent of schools. Dewey's wife, Alice Chipman Dewey, was selected as principal. Although the program eventually became departmentalized, the administrative lines remained very fluid and many administrative responsibilities were often handled by the teachers themselves. Program planning was done by the faculty, students, parents, and friends of the project. There was a constant flow through the Laboratory School of university faculty from several departments, who donated materials, provided equipment, served as consultants, and whenever feasible, got directly involved in the teaching of the children.

The students were organized into groups varying in size from about eight to 10 for the younger children and 12 to 15 for the older ones.⁹ The instructional program for these groups was organized around three recognized stages of growth. The four- through six-year-olds represented the first stage that, highlighting the integration of home and

school, concentrated on storytelling, motor activities, and directed social experiences. The seven- and eight-year-olds were a transitional group into the second stage serving nine- and ten-year-olds. At this stage there was increased concern for skills in reading, writing, and numbers that could be put to use in activities requiring a more sophisticated use of organized knowledge in solving problems. Eleven- and twelve-year-olds were a transitional group to the third stage, which culminated at about the age of thirteen. The third stage focused on projects that demanded rather high levels of reflective thinking and encouraged the investigation of specialized problems. Throughout the first two stages there was an emphasis on the interrelatedness of various fields of knowledge so that when students began in-depth investigation of specialized problems at the third stage they would see how knowledge from many fields bears on the solution to the problem.

Through the use of homerooms and by working on common problems, children were encouraged to maintain an identity with their group. However, the groups mingled freely and shared the gymnasium, kitchen, dining rooms, textile and art studios, and the manual training facilities in the Ellis Avenue house.

Education Through the Study of Occupations

Men have had to work in order to live. In and through their work they have mastered nature, they have protected and enriched the conditions of their own life, they have awakened to the sense of their own powers—have been led to invent, to plan, and to rejoice in the acquisition of skill.¹⁰

Stage I. Occupations was the central instructional theme at the Laboratory School. The work that people actually engaged in provided the models for instructional activities. The four- and five-year-olds, while retaining continuity with their earlier experiences as members of a family, were initiated into a wider sphere of social life by concentrating on household occupations in a school and community setting. Games, play, songs, and stories were integrated into activities related to household occupations. Whether serving lunch, helping with dishwashing, sharing stories of their various family lifestyles, or building a model town of blocks, the accent was on those activities that extended

the child's ability to appreciate and to cope with an increasingly complex social environment.

Dewey thought that throughout Stage I and the following two transition years (ages four through eight) emphasis should be on activities that focused on motor skills, direct social interaction, relatively short-range achievement goals, and oral communication. Number skills, he theorized, would grow naturally from measurement activities in the manual arts and cooking; and reading and writing skills could be introduced incidentally through such efforts as work reports, project plans, or drama scripts. Each group within this Stage I was expected to progress by demonstrating more generalized interests, more sophisticated skills, and longer attention spans. For example, discussions of farming by the six-year-olds led to a project of planting winter wheat, which in turn was generalized to a whole series of projects and studies involving everything from the impact of climate on crop selection to the effect of terrain on efforts to irrigate. The investigation by the seven-year-olds of the occupations of primitive tribes was generalized to such studies as the impact of simple inventions on social organization.

To extend the study of civilization in its more complex forms, the actual problems faced by the ancient Phoenicians in their occupations was selected as the theme for the eight-year-olds. As one visualizes children standing around a rather elaborate sandbox mock-up of the ancient Mediterranean world of the Phoenicians, and as they try to solve problems related to trade routes, crop selection, or collecting raw materials to be used for bartering, one is reminded of the present day scientist using such things as wind tunnels to resolve complex engineering problems. To assume that children engaged in this learning activity were merely playing would be as absurd as to assume the scientists of the same.

The Laboratory School was not testing whether the children could discover how Phoenicians solved their problems, but rather whether such activities could develop in the children the habit of confronting problematic situations in an orderly and effective fashion. Dewey rejected the traditional notion of thinking as the mind acting independent of the body. Rather, he construed thinking as an operation involving the total organism's interaction with the environment. Thinking

was effective if the problem was solved. Growth occurred if, in the resolution of the problem, the children's experiences prepared them to undertake more complex problems.

All the activities in Stage I, as well as in the transition stage, used the theme of occupations to give order and continuity to learning experiences. Children's interests that arose naturally from games played, stories told, or field trips taken, served as starting points for learning. However, activities that grew out of such interests were planned and shared by the children and the teachers with an end-in-view of acquiring skills and knowledge that would provide them with greater control over their environment. Manual training and cooking were used to connect learning and active work and to take advantage of the natural need of this age group to express itself in manipulative and motor activities. Such tasks as sewing, weaving, gardening, carpentering, and smelting were meant to serve as a

point of departure from which the child can trace and follow the progress of mankind in history, getting an insight also into the materials used and the mechanical principles involved. In connection with these occupations, the historic development of man is recapitulated.¹¹

Emphasis was on learning as a social and cooperative enterprise. The atmosphere was cordial and relaxed as the children moved easily from their homerooms to laboratories, the gymnasium, textile studio, kitchen, and manual arts shop. There were also frequent field trips to the wider environs of the city of Chicago.

Stage II. As a format for organizing instruction the Laboratory School used stages of growth to denote distinctive levels of learning abilities. It was Dewey's contention that children move at different rates in the various stages, but that the dominant signs of later stages are sometimes exhibited, but to a lesser degree, in earlier stages. He believed that those characteristics that distinguish Stage II (nine and ten-year-olds) revolve around the ability of young people to pursue means in relation to deferred ends. Such an ability is not usually present in Stage I.

In the first stage of growth there is always motor activity, and there is always a story, a drama, an image—a mental whole. But the two are not

separate from each other. Acts are not, to the child's consciousness, means for realizing ideas; they are just spontaneous overflow and exhibition. The child's thoughts are not something to be realized; they are the living meaning and value that saturate whatever he does.¹²

Because children in Stage II, Dewey reasoned, are able to defer specific ends in the pursuit of certain means, they are ready to work on such skills as reading, writing, and numbers as a set of concentrated and distinct studies and apart from any requirements growing out of a project. Other characteristics of Stage II that he noted are the ability for greater self-control and the desire for activities that allow for more self-direction. Such new independence was in no way to detract from the Laboratory School's commitment to learn as an essentially social enterprise, to be conducted in a cooperative, not a competitive, atmosphere.

Dewey found wanting that popular notion that individual freedom and independence must be curtailed in order to establish an orderly society. For him, the issue was not one of negotiating the rights of the individual with the needs of society but one of creating social arrangements in a society through which the individual can develop as an intelligent, free human being. The program established for Stage II and its transition stages was intended to provide those social arrangements within the Laboratory School itself. However, young people would also have to look beyond the immediacy of their own environment in order to appreciate the vast possibilities of controlling a wider social and physical environment that would enhance the individual. Dewey saw the study of history as valuable in this effort because it represented

... a record of how man learned to think, to think to some effect, to transform the conditions of life so that life itself became a different thing. It is an ethical record as well, the account of the conditions which men have patiently wrought out to serve their ends.¹³

For the nine-year-olds that interest in history centered on the United States; and, given the location of the Laboratory School, a natural point of departure was the heritage of Chicago itself. The children used Chicago's museums and historical locations for field trips. They engaged also in what we today refer to as the "Foxfire" approach, conducting interviews with elderly local citizens in order to create an oral

history that would provide insight into early ways of coping. The work of ten-year-olds focused on the development of the American colonies and on the major social and political factors affecting life in both pre- and post-revolutionary times. Students discussed such issues as how capital was acquired to create large companies in the Colonial period and the factors that prompted explorations such as those conducted by Henry Hudson. One group of students spent a great deal of time in the shop, duplicating the furnishings of a room in Colonial times. They constructed everything from a leather bed to a working fireplace. Such activities contributed to an understanding of the substantial effort required to produce basic necessities and of how specialized occupations began to emerge in pre-industrial America.

This same group also conducted an in-depth study of the political and economic factors involved in the American Revolution and also the geographic factors that determined the war strategies used by the colonists. With the latter study, students were engaged in a great deal of rather sophisticated map-making, an activity that continued in their studies of territorial expansion in the U.S. The 11-year-olds studied the cultural background of selected European nations prior to the colonization of America. They covered such topics as occupations and sociology of feudal life, physical geography, the mechanics of the early textile industry, and English literature and Latin. The latter two subjects were taught primarily through drama and a conversational approach, respectively.

Since students at this level of development were able to work in terms of deferred ends, there was an emphasis on establishing a strong foundation of fundamental skills in mathematics and science aside from skill needs arising through projects. Interestingly enough, there was significant attention given to the use of metric measurement. During the transition stage of the 12-year-olds, a new level of specialized activities was introduced.

Stage III. The transition from Stages II to III was marked by the increasing attention to problems that were of intrinsic interest to the learner. While Stage II was characterized by the learner's willingness to defer ends in the pursuit of certain means, there was, nevertheless, always an end, "something to be done or made, or some tangible result

to be reached . . .¹⁴ Stage III (13- to 15-year-olds) was characterized by the learner's "increased ability to abstract natural fact, material, or theory from its place in experience, to handle it, to experiment with it, to analyze it, and to formulate statements or principles with regard to it. . . . [to] play around a problem, just because it is a problem."¹⁵ In recognition of these emerging abilities, the activities for this age group became increasingly more specialized, self-directed, and theoretical. However, the fact that the activities for Stage III often represented a strong academic emphasis should in no way be interpreted as a move on the part of the Laboratory School to establish a traditional subject-centered curriculum. In fact, one of the basic goals of the Laboratory School was to develop the proper relationship between the learner and those organized bodies of knowledge as typically represented in the curriculum.

Actually, formal subject matter was very much a part of the curriculum in the Laboratory School. But subject matter was functional for these students since they themselves had often been in on the creation of it. Witness, for example, the efforts of one group of eight-year-olds who, in their study of the evolution of ancient trade practices, had to deal with the problem of the origin of pamber. The problem arose when they faced the question of how a trader could record an order to bring 24 fish of a certain kind the next time he visited his customer.¹⁶ The children had to invent ways to record this information; and their concerns, quite legitimately, were with the origin of a number system and its relationship to measurement and communication.

Such activities represented the spirit of Dewey's position that students could not capture the real meaning of any subject matter by passively absorbing it as a set of abstractions but only by actively using it to solve problems. For Dewey, then, the issue was not whether education should be subject-centered or child-centered but whether subject matter could be used in a functional way to solve those problems in which the child had a personal investment.

As students progressed into Stage III their reflective abilities allowed them to utilize subject matter that was increasingly abstract and theoretical. Using their increasing abilities, the students continued their historical studies with more sophistication and concentrated on

the American Revolution, the westward expansion, and the impact of growing industries on social and political organization. In the area of science, students conducted a series of experiments dealing with changes from gaseous to liquid to solid states; and these experiments were related to the then new theories regarding the formation of the earth. They also wrote individual reports on and drew maps of the geological history of the U.S. They developed a number of crude but effective instruments for measuring the changing positions of the earth in relation to the sun's rays, and from such activities the students gained a fuller understanding of the measurement of time and the passage of seasons. They became most enthusiastic about their work in astronomy, which was, to a great extent, inspired by university lectures attended by some of the students.

In Stage III, there was increased emphasis given to individual rather than group work. In writing and evaluating reports, much attention was given to the development of language arts skills. Although there continued to be substantial arithmetic and geometry work correlated with various science projects, there was increased emphasis on learning mathematical concepts apart from project requirements.

The unique characteristics of Stage III became clearly evident with a group of 12-year-olds who had developed an interest in photography and constructed in the shop a number of pinhole cameras. By the next year, their concerns, as Dewey noted, changed appreciably "from the practical attitude of making and using cameras to the consideration of the problems intellectually involved in this—to principles of light, angular measurements, etc., which give the theory or explanation of the practice."¹⁷ The activities in language arts reflected an increased sense of independence by focusing on self-expression through stories and poems written by the students for presentation in school programs. Work in music theory revolved around the study of basic harmony, and students wrote and arranged songs and then performed them.

Although traditional art forms such as poetry, creative writing, and music composition were important facets of the program at the Laboratory School, they in no way exhausted the concern for education in the arts. Dewey's concern for the arts was much more comprehensive and of more social significance than conventional notions. Arthur

Wirth characterized Dewey's position on the role of the artist when he noted:

It is in art that the values of a civilization are expressed. An individual attains a sense of fulfillment not only when his special abilities are expressed but also when the producer realizes that his work is related to the ideals of his society. This is one feature that distinguishes the mechanic as technician from the mechanic as artist. He is a technician when he produces merely for the special need at hand. He becomes an artist when he senses what his product means in terms of social value.¹⁸

The young people in the Laboratory School were directly involved in art as they came in touch with the heritage of their own civilization through their study of occupations. It was typical in the Laboratory School to see a young child carding wool on a hatchel he had both designed and constructed. Such activity represented the creative expression of the artist, not simply the humdrum utilitarianism of the technician.

One of the most extensive efforts relating to the manual arts and creative expression grew out of an actual and immediate need of the students in the years 1902-03. Students in two school organizations, one



Source: The Dewey School

A group of girls constructing the Club-House

a discussion and debate group called the Dewey Club and the other called the Camera Club, were frustrated by their inability to find adequate meeting space in the increasingly cramped quarters of the Ellis Avenue House. They decided to plan, build, and furnish a clubhouse on the school grounds. And with the help of other students, parents, teachers, and friends, they constructed a marvelous building that was sturdy, beautifully trimmed, and even had a fireplace. The Club-House as they called it, also served as a darkroom for the camera club students. The Club-House was furnished with chairs, tables, and cushions that the students themselves had made.

The worth of the activities associated with constructing and furnishing the Club-House was judged ultimately by the way in which they provided experiences that were truly educational. Building of the Club-House inspired the study of architectural styles associated with various cultures. Also, such technological concerns as drainage, ventilation, and lighting were studied as general problems as well as problems related to the specific design of the Club-House. One of the first concerns was the selection of a proper site for the building. This concern led to a series of field trips to study Chicago building sites, which, in turn, initiated inquiry into the physical geography of Chicago, its rather unusual drainage problems, the need for building a canal, and the social and economic impact of the city's very favorable location on the Great Lakes. Building the Club-House obviously represented far more than simply applying technical skills.

Because Dewey's Laboratory School was so short-lived, it is difficult to assess the effects of the educational philosophy espoused at the elementary level on the attitudes and abilities of secondary school students. But had the School continued, it would have been necessary to make certain fundamental program and physical plant changes for the older students. For many of the 14- and 15-year-olds, enthusiasm for shop work had diminished and the quality of their work declined.¹⁹ These older students had to prepare for College Board examinations, and such study was not easily integrated into the normal mode of the program. The noise and interruptions caused by the cramped physical facilities no doubt negatively affected the older children, whose specialized activities involving more rigorous study required peace and quiet.

However, in their book, *The Dewey School*, Mayhew and Edwards argue that these young people had been well prepared to enter secondary school. Their assessment was that the Laboratory School had given the children the best of a progressive education throughout the elementary level in an atmosphere of mutual trust and cooperation, where student interests and needs were taken into account, and the learning process was fostered

not only without sacrifice of thoroughness, mental discipline, and command of the technical tools of learning but also with a positive enlargement of life, and a wider, freer, and more open outlook upon it.²⁰

Program Evaluation

The orientation of the Laboratory School was essentially experimental. Evaluation techniques now used for assessing educational experimentation were not available at the turn of the century. But even with the lack of refined evaluation techniques, the personnel at the Laboratory School did evaluate the theory they were attempting to implement. Available teachers' reports and records showing systematic program changes provide evidence that the staff took seriously the charge of continually assessing educational theory as it was put into practice. In the first six months of existence, the school operated almost entirely on a trial-and-error basis, and not until two-and-one-half years had passed did there emerge a generally uniform and stable format for instruction. It must be remembered that creating the conditions whereby teachers could examine educational principles in light of educational practice was itself a part of the experiment at the Laboratory School. Concern about evaluation is reflected in a letter from John Dewey to Katherine Mayhew some years after his association with the school had terminated. In speaking about the weekly meetings of parents and teachers in the early years, he noted that there was a tendency

to devote too much time and attention to the peculiarities and difficulties of individual children. . . . Experience showed that "principles" were too much taken for granted as being already understood by all teachers; in the later years an increasing number of meetings were allotted to the specific discussion of underlying principles and aims. Results would undoubtedly have improved if there had been more of such meetings in earlier years.²¹

Program improvement occurred as staff engaged in continuing dialogue on principles and aims and tested out in practice Dewey's philosophy and theories. The result was an experimental school that demonstrated that progressive principles can be carried out effectively without excessive permissiveness.

Over the years of the experiment, project and occupation activities were pursued only when it could be demonstrated that they would contribute to social, psychological, and cognitive development. After the initial two years of a rather child-centered program, proposed projects based on student interest and needs were accepted only when they contributed to growth in problem-solving abilities. The progressive education commitment to the health needs of children evolved in practice through such efforts as physical examinations, individualized exercise programs, rhythmic drills with music, and constant attention to the study of diet. Steadily, the scientific method became the method of inquiry "at all times and in all situations where processes and activities were such that active investigation, testing out of guesses or theories, imagining possible results of this or that physical or social relation could be carried on."²²

There is no reason to believe that Dewey and the staff would not have continued to improve their experiment in progressive education had their efforts not been abruptly halted by a set of frustrating circumstances involving both huge sums of money and ideological clashes.

The Collapse of the Experiment

The future of John Dewey's experiment at the Laboratory School was to become directly affected by the professional circumstances of a fellow progressive educator, Colonel Francis Wayland Parker. In 1899 Colonel Parker resigned as head of a teacher training institute in Chicago because of years of harassment and interference by a conservative majority of the institute's controlling body, the Cook County Commission. His hurt and frustration were appeased considerably by a gift of one million dollars for him to establish a school that would reflect his philosophy of teacher training. His benefactor was Mrs. Emmons Blaine, the wealthy daughter of Cyrus McCormick, the inventor of the reaper.

William Rainey Harper, then president of the University of Chicago, became aware of Mrs. Blaine's gift and began negotiations with her and Colonel Parker to bring the endowment to the University. In March 1901, an agreement was reached to establish a School of Education at the University with Parker as director of the elementary school and Dewey as head of the secondary level. Unfortunately, all arrangements had been made without Dewey's involvement. The Laboratory School parents were shocked and dismayed, for they knew well that Dewey's form of progressive education could easily be compromised by the substantially different progressive orientation of Parker. Further, they did not want their children attending a school dedicated to the training of teachers. The parents negotiated quickly with the Board of Trustees, and for a guaranteed annual contribution of \$5,000 to the University of Chicago, they secured the promise that Parker's practice school for teachers would be kept separate from Dewey's experimental school.

Ill for some time, Parker died in March 1902. By the fall of 1903, Dewey was acting as director of the School of Education, which by that time included not only Parker's institute but also the Chicago Manual Training School and the South Side Academy. A strong Parker supporter, Wilburn Jackman, was appointed dean and Dewey's wife, Alice Chipman Dewey, was named principal of the elementary school. Beginning the 1903-04 academic year, these merged groups were all housed in the beautiful, new School of Education Building, later to be named Emmons Blaine Hall.

The initial and mutual distrust between the Parker and Dewey people soon evolved into open hostility. Mrs. Blaine and Mr. Jackman kept President Harper well apprised of the difficulties, and much of their dissatisfaction focused on Mrs. Dewey, the caretaker of John Dewey's philosophical interests. When John Dewey was absent from the University, President Harper called for an appointment with Mrs. Dewey and requested her resignation. Upon Dewey's return to campus, he met with Harper.

He ended the interview with President Harper, which was a hot one, by presenting his resignation as professor of education. As soon as he got

outside the door he realized that Harper's expression on hearing this had been one of relief.²³

The timing of the events made it seem to some that John Dewey resigned because of the way his wife had been treated. He objected strenuously to that inference and within a month of his resignation he felt compelled to write to President Harper to clear up the matter.

As you are aware, the construction you put by statement and by implications of context upon my resignation in your letters of April 30th do not represent my own reasons for resigning—a point upon which I am presumably the better informed.

In presenting my resignation to the Board of Trustees, and in recommending its acceptance, I request you make it clear to the Board that the question of the alleged failure to reappoint Mrs. Dewey as Principal of the Elementary School is in no sense the cause of my resignation, and that this question had never been discussed between us till after our resignations were in your hands. Your willingness to embarrass and hamper my work as Director by making use of the fact that Mrs. Dewey was principal is but one incident in the history of years.²⁴

John Dewey was an extraordinarily gentle man, and that letter to President Harper is atypical of his style. But it reflected well the tension that had developed. The Laboratory School had brought much renown to the young University of Chicago but it had received little support and encouragement from that institution. Dewey resigned because there was every reason to believe that the University administration had no intention of changing its disposition toward his efforts. John Dewey left Chicago, his staff resigned, and the experiment was over.

Update

The Laboratory School at the University of Chicago continues to be an impressive operation, but there are few vestiges of Dewey's vision in its present mission. Now, the singular purpose of the school is to prepare young people for college. The uniformly high achieving student body of about 1500 is primarily of the middle and upper-middle classes, and yet it is diverse racially and ethnically. The complex includes a nursery, lower, middle, and high school. Although

graduate students often intern there, the Laboratory School is not formally connected to the University of Chicago School of Education.

Tuition costs are substantial, but the school attracts outstanding students not only from the university community and the neighborhood areas, but also from a growing number of Chicago's metropolitan suburbs. When asked why the University continues to sponsor the Laboratory School that is no longer truly experimental, Director R. Bruce McPherson said simply that the school as it now functions "is important to the faculty, to the community, and the University respects tradition."²⁵

Dewey's Laboratory School was a pioneering venture in American education and is probably best remembered from its days in the Ellis Avenue House, not in its current location in Emmons Blaine Hall. But the very fact of there being a University of Chicago Laboratory School housed in such marvelous quarters is, to a great extent, *his* legacy. A more important legacy is the ideas he put into practice in the Laboratory School, which demonstrated a commitment to the idea that the concerns of education are worthy of the most serious scholarship a university can provide.

The City and Country School

One group within the progressive education movement who gave the movement a bad name were the "cult of the child" extremists who opened schools that were little more than classroom bedlam. For these free spirits, anything that was restrictive to a child's "creativity" was abhorrent. To the chagrin of other progressive educators, these advocates of unbounded permissiveness freely announced themselves as representatives of child-centered progressivism.

Problems of extremism aside, there were students of education whose commitments were progressive, whose orientation was child-centered, and whose contributions to the field of education remain significant. Caroline Pratt was such a student.

A Rural Beginning

At ten, my great-aunt used to say, I could turn a team of horses and a wagon in less space than a grown man needed to do it.²⁶

A study of Pratt's early life reveals interesting parallels to that of John Dewey. Only eight years his junior, she was born in Fayetteville, New York, in 1867. Further, she was raised in an agrarian setting where life was rather simple and where the most valued experiences were those that could be gained firsthand. Within such an environment, Pratt noted that formal education was incidental and schools were

... a place where we learned only the mechanical tools, the three R's and a smattering about things far away and long ago. Our really important learning, the learning how to live in the world into which we were born and how to participate in its work, was right at hand, outside the school-house walls.²⁷

At 16, without any formal preparation, she began teaching in a one-room school. In addition to that experience, she taught first grade. Then she received a scholarship from Teachers College, Columbia University, to prepare as a kindergarten teacher. She found the Teachers College program as repressive as she had found her own teaching unsatisfactory. For her there was a certain uneasiness in being in the classroom, whether as a teacher or a student. She expressed these vague sentiments to her dean and accepted his recommendation to transfer to Arts and Crafts, where the curriculum was more utilitarian. Two years later she was teaching manual training in the Normal School for Girls in Philadelphia.

An important link existed in the experiences of Caroline Pratt and John Dewey. Through his association with Jane Addams in Chicago, Dewey realized the enormity of the school's responsibility for helping the working class and immigrant children of the industrialized city. Dewey was, in fact, extremely active in the work of Jane Addams' famous Hull House settlement and served on its first board of trustees. Likewise, Pratt found herself heavily involved with industrialized working conditions through her friendship with the labor union acti-



Caroline Pratt at work at her desk

Source: Jean W. Murray

vist, Helen Marot. That experience no doubt inspired her to return to New York in 1901 to work in settlement houses as a manual arts teacher.

In working with children at the settlement houses, Pratt came to realize the failure of urban education to prepare working-class young people in the most rudimentary of intellectual skills. In fact, she could see almost no impact, let alone benefits, from their years in the public schools. Although she was finding her own teaching to be increasingly satisfying, there was as yet no clear direction or unifying principle to her efforts. It was one simple event, but one so full of meaning to Pratt, that would inspire her to a lifetime of dedication to an educational experiment.

Toward a Philosophy of Education

The remarkable experience occurred during a visit to the home of a friend who had a six-year-old son. There she found him at play, totally absorbed in a make-believe railroad system. Spread over the room were some toys, some blocks, and any number of household items, a few scrounged from the wastebasket. The boy was re-creating a world that made sense in his terms. He was an active participant in that world, building the system, controlling the movement of the trains, and supplying the variety of sounds associated with a railroad. Caroline remembered:

It was a fascinating thought that came to me, pressed against the wall of that nursery so as not to get in the way of the busy miniature world he had created there. I thought that this was one little boy's way of learning about the world he lived in; he had observed for himself, had gathered his facts, and was here, before my eyes, writing the perfect child's textbook of what he had seen. Here, in a combination of map, model, and working drawing with sound track—such a combination as had never existed in any classroom, more's the pity—he was setting down his understanding of the way things worked, the relationships of facts to each other, the causes and effects, the purposes and functions. This was thinking, this was learning. This was the way a young child, if freed to do so, would go about educating himself on the subject which was of most immediate, intense interest to him—the world in which he lived.²⁸

The excitement of this boy's learning stood in sharp contrast to the

dulled interest in learning she had observed among so many of the settlement house children. For her, the experience sparked an enthusiasm to find a way whereby all young people might share in the re-creation or dramatization of events, i.e., dramatic play.

Her initial efforts were a bit fragmented. She resigned her teaching post at the settlement house in order to devote full time to designing simple toys that could be used for dramatic play. The toys depicted familiar objects in the child's life such as boats, houses, and stables. Further, the designs were simple enough so that children could use them to make other toys or constructions. She called her creations "Do-Withs." Pratt introduced the idea of mass producing the "Do-Withs" to a manufacturer, and he was enough taken with the idea to enter into a partnership with her. However, their joint venture was short-lived and ended as a financial failure. Ironically, some years later Caroline Pratt refused to seek a patent on the incredibly successful unit blocks she had designed, maintaining that the blocks were nothing but pieces of wood until they were "infused with a body of information which is gleaned from experience."²⁹

Pratt's next effort in 1913 involved an experiment with a group of neighborhood five-year-olds. She was curious about how little ones might respond if they were given no directions but merely exposed to an environment rich in objects. She was offered a room in the Hartley House settlement on New York's West Side to use as a play area for her six invited guests. In the room were placed such things as blocks, clay, paper, crayons and, of course, "Do-Withs." Once the experiment began, she did not intervene with the children at play but recorded her observations meticulously.

In the short span of two months, Pratt became absolutely convinced that self-generated and self-directed play required many forms of thinking and did inspire learning. She also came to believe that firsthand knowledge acquired through play experiences was of most worth to the young people. She believed giving verbal information to children or even reading them stories inhibited rather than facilitated learning. Further, she was convinced that the social interaction involved in dramatic play was a critical factor to healthy growth.

By borrowing money and with some financial assistance from the

trade union activist. Edna Smith, Pratt was able to rent a three-room apartment to begin a year-long experiment with five-year-olds. She called it the Play School. One year later in 1915 Pratt, together with her friends, Helen Marot and Edna Smith, rented a small house in Greenwich Village and used it both as their living quarters and as a school for children from four to six years old. Pratt's typical method of acquiring students was, very simply, open recruiting in the streets. She would wander about, spy a likely-looking candidate, locate the parents, and give a pitch for the Play School. Another way of getting students was through acquaintances who recommended her school to other friends who had children of the appropriate age.

It became increasingly apparent to Pratt and her fellow enthusiasts that the school's proximity to Greenwich Village was a critical factor in recruiting students. The only people who would risk a radical alternative to public education for their children were those writers and artists who had settled in Greenwich Village, where their free-thinking lifestyle was tolerated. Children from more conventional homes would have to wait until the Play School became more reputable. Two fortuitous events helped to bring Pratt that needed reputation.

First, John and Evelyn Dewey in their book, *Schools of Tomorrow*, published in 1915, made many complimentary remarks about the Play School. Evelyn Dewey, John Dewey's daughter, had observed firsthand the work of the school; and the positive acknowledgment of the school by someone as prominent as John Dewey brought national attention to the school. The result was a steady flow of visitors to the Play School and even offers of financial assistance from philanthropists. The second event that would ultimately assure a solid reputation for the Play School was a chance meeting of Caroline Pratt and Lucy Sprague Mitchell.

The first dean of women and first woman on the faculty of the University of California, Lucy Sprague Mitchell was interested in innovative ideas and was not at all reluctant to become involved in projects she believed to have merit. For some time she had been studying how children learn, so she was naturally interested in Pratt's experiment. Although Mitchell's national reputation would eventually become associated with her work in New York's Bank Street Nursery School

and Elizabeth Irwin's Little Red School House, she also taught at, administered, and financially supported Pratt's Play School. Her first efforts on behalf of the Play School were to provide new quarters on MacDougal Alley and to join the staff as a teacher.

In 1921 Lucy Sprague Mitchell and her husband, the internationally respected economist Wesley Clair Mitchell, offered rent-free space to Caroline in the buildings that house the school to this day. It is a magnificent set of six converted brownstones with connecting yards on West Twelfth and Thirteenth Streets in Greenwich Village. The move to these quarters provided adequate and permanent physical facilities. The school began to develop a clear sense of direction, which did not mean the end of experimentation but rather a coalescence of theory and practice that would serve to give order to instructional change.

To assuage the feelings of students who objected to their work being called play, the name of the school was changed to The City and Country School. The "country" in the school's name referred to a short-lived experiment in camping. However, the name stuck. The staff grew to twenty-odd, serving a student body of 200, ranging in age from three to 13. Caroline Pratt did not retire from the school as teacher and principal until 1945, nine years before her death at the age of 87.

A Focus on Creative Expression Through Play

Borrowing terminology from modern art Miss Pratt was running together elements of both impressionism and expressionism. The children re-created what they had experienced, but the re-creation was not a mirroring; it was interpretation, a personal account of environment-as-felt. What results in the block city, as Miss Pratt saw it, is the outcome of the child's attempt to deal with his idea of the city he experienced. It is as much thoughtful expression as recording of impression. Neither impressionism nor expressionism, she thought, acts alone in the child's mind.³⁰

Children's fundamental medium for the re-creation of experience was play; and for Caroline Pratt, play was a most serious subject. It was through play that children began to make sense of their world, to draw relationships among ideas, and to make cause-and-effect connections within events they experienced. Reminiscent of Dewey's position,

Pratt emphasized that children growing up in rural nineteenth-century America had little trouble integrating through play the everyday events of their world. Young people were exposed in an intimate way to the entire process of planting, cultivating, and harvesting food. They cared for and knew early on the function of farm animals. In a word, they saw firsthand the connection between the activities engaged in by members of the family and the goods required for the survival of a family.

In the villages they saw such industries as horseshoeing, milking and other simple factory processes, differing in different communities. They knew the source of the materials and the meaning of the processes at a time when the instinct for play was strong. Each child knew what his father's work was, and something of how he did it. All this rich material was theirs to imitate. It has a unifying character, a carrying quality which led the children on and on.³¹

It was the lack of a unifying character in the experiences of the city child that made imitation of life through play so difficult. Lucy Sprague Mitchell characterized poignantly the kind of fragmentation of experience to which the child in the city was exposed.

A three-year-old in a city environment may be whisked to his steamheated nursery in an electric elevator, fed from supplies which are ordered by telephone, sent up by dumbwaiter, and stored in an electric refrigerator; he may be taken to a hole in the sidewalk and borne rapidly on an underground train to a distant place. The forces which move his elevator, warm his nursery, extend his mother's voice to a grocery store, cool his milk, propel the subway train, are complicated and difficult to understand not only at three, at six, at nine, but even at forty.³²

Overcoming the estrangement that existed between the children of the city and their complex environment was a major task of the City and Country School. Through play, children could begin to sort out and understand the dynamics of city life. Frequent and varied field trips, taken by all age groups, provided rich opportunities for constructive play.

A field trip might consist of nothing more than a casual stroll through Greenwich Village. The bustle, noise, and incredible variety of street activities may not have much meaning for the very little ones, but it was the teacher's responsibility to call attention to those activities

that had potential for giving order to a child's experience. It was Pratt's view that the true art of teaching was best reflected by how a teacher could anticipate a child's readiness to profit from a particular experience. While such an art could not be translated into a set of specified teaching techniques, very general guidelines were used for directing children's attention to certain topics of interest.

Through a question or two, the teacher would focus on a particular object or event. If the city streets were crowded with trucks, a question might be raised concerning the load on one truck rather than calling attention to the various loads of all the trucks. For example, a teacher might call attention to a truck that was carrying large rolls of paper. The children might then follow the truck and find themselves at the loading ramp of a city newspaper, which would then lead to further questions. Students of the City and Country School were very accustomed to such ventures and became quite accomplished both at probing for information and at wrangling invitations for guided tours. Aside from the obvious potential for learning, which a visit to a newspaper holds, the children were also intent on finding out what activities came before the journey of the truck. Such interest often motivated the children to move beyond the confines of the city in search of information—in the illustration used, to a paper mill outside New York City.

An important aspect of teaching at the City and Country School involved the ability to ask leading questions. Actually, teachers asked very few questions, but those they did ask were intended to set off a train of thought in the child, leading to a sequence of activities chosen by the child that provided understanding and coherence in the life experience of the child.

Upon returning to school, the children very naturally imitated their field trip experiences through play. The youngest received no directions from the teachers but were allowed to sort out in their own terms the world of the city they had so recently experienced. For such purposes, the children were supplied simple toys that inspired imaginative play. It was Pratt's contention that there was little opportunity for creative play if all the toys were so realistic in design that there was no latitude for using them in a variety of ways.

With the highly individualistic nature of play for those under the age of five, each child was allowed a separate mat to work on and a partial screen to provide some privacy. But as the children reached the age of about seven, the permissive atmosphere of the classroom was controlled somewhat as "... their attention [was] called to the informative facts of a trip and the possibilities for reconstruction."¹⁵ At this age level, not only were teachers more direct in suggesting topics for play but also the projects undertaken involved a good deal more cooperative interaction among the students. For these older children, social learning was a high priority.

All groups at the City and Country School were referred to by age; and the "sevens" were to Pratt a pivotal group in terms of a developmental learning level. They were on the verge of becoming bored with the extended block construction play but remained intrigued with the free expression of a make-believe world. It was a marvelous time to expand play to include substantially more permanent constructions



Source: *Experimental Schools Revisited*

Children making a construction with yard blocks.

and more sophisticated representations of the complexities of city life. Shop activities were accelerated and the children constructed miniature dwellings such as stores, firehouses, police stations, factories, and post offices. They role played the various occupations associated with their creations. Their role playing inspired new field trips, which resulted in new learning. For example, generators, dynamos, turbines, and boilers all became a part of the general understanding and vocabulary of the "sevens" when they visited a generating plant in the city in connection with electrically wiring the miniature city they had constructed.

Pratt was thoroughly convinced that learning was most effective when attained through play and firsthand experience; and she worried that turning to the printed word for information would curb such learning. She did, however, eventually acquiesce to pressure brought by the students and their parents and allowed reading to be taught beginning with the "sevens."

The original name of Play School aptly described the learning activities of the three- to seven-year-olds. Further, the type of play involved was multi-dimensional. The children did creative rhythm exercises, authored stories that were transcribed to paper by teachers, created and performed plays, cooked, modeled with clay, and painted. Familiarity with numbers and measurement came as a natural outgrowth of work in the shop and kitchen. Frequent trips to the New York harbor to talk to ship and barge captains, truck drivers, and dock workers led to a good deal of map making from which the students gained a fair understanding of world geography. In all these activities, "Miss Pratt tried to further a process of deepening and expanding experiences. This she sought to do by retaining a child-centered focus for the curriculum while constantly bringing the child into new fields of knowledge and life; this was an experience-centered school."³¹

Jobs

The re-creation of experience through play was beginning to be boring for the "eights." These children needed activities that were more intellectually demanding; they wanted increased responsibilities and expanded opportunities to serve some purpose beyond their own

learning. The staff soon concluded that what the "eights" wanted was a job. The acquisition and distribution of supplies at the City and Country School had always presented logistical problems. It occurred to the staff that such tasks were actually rife with opportunities for learning. With some hesitancy, the "eights" were offered the job of managing the school store; and without equivocation they accepted.

The school store venture was never allowed to develop into one of playing at grown-up work. The "eights" literally took over a real enterprise, one very important to the welfare of the entire school. They began by building a structure in the corner of their classroom out of which they could display goods, serve customers, handle money, and record transactions. These young people borrowed money, contracted for supplies with wholesale houses, balanced the books, and paid the bills. Personnel charts were devised for rotating responsibilities. There were some tedious tasks such as filling paint jars, copying price lists, and counting, stacking, and packaging items. There were also the exciting tasks such as weekly buying trips to the wholesale stationery stores and serving as salespersons at the school store. Although responsibilities were generally shared on a rotating basis, those "eights" who had not yet acquired adequate trading and number skills obviously could not participate in such prestigious activities as that of store cashier.

The varied demands of running the store provided tremendous motivation for learning reading, writing, and arithmetic as well as those social skills required for any complex cooperative effort. As the students' responsibility grew, so did their pride that came with accomplishment. The store activities often inspired field trips, which in turn spurred their interest in economics and the history of occupations. Pratt, ever the advocate of play, was quick to point out that it was not unusual to see the "eights" pretending to be early Dutch traders on the Hudson or Indians at a fur-trading post. The children also dramatized those same activities in songs, plays, poems, and paintings. But always they returned in deadly earnest to their store duties—selling to their fellow students the pencils, erasers, notebooks, clay, paint, and all those other materials so familiar to the progressive school.

The school store of the "eights" was not merely a learning tool but a

method of integrating a whole range of school experiences that built a strong group identity. This was clearly evident to the staff, so they soon found jobs for the older students. The "nines" opened a post office, which developed into an elaborate affair involving inter-school communication as well as a postal service for parents and staff. The students packaged, weighed, rated, stamped, and delivered items to a post office branch for mailing. "Nines" typically got caught up in studying the historical impact of the postal service specifically and mass communications generally on the total fabric of American life. Related field trips were common; and in those simpler times, the children were actually allowed to help sort mail in some smaller postal branches. Eventually, and for pedagogical reasons, the "eights" and "nines" switched jobs. Their enthusiasm did not diminish in either group by the change.

Fulfilling the constant need for hand-lettered materials, the "tens" took on the job of manuscript writing such items as lunchroom menu charts, name plates, flash cards, and reading charts. Knowing that the neatness of their manuscript writing would serve as models for the younger students, they took great pains to calculate the spaces for their letters, which were meticulously printed. The venture was so successful that a substantial backlog of orders was typical. Waiting tables in the lunchroom was a supplemental job for the "tens."

The "elevens" served as school printers, initially using a manual foot press and later an electric press. Organized along the ideas used in the old guilds, rather rigorous tests were established to determine which students served as apprentices, journeymen, and master printers. The tests were taken with utmost seriousness for the work done was always exacting and often complicated. The "elevens" sometimes printed simple materials such as letterheads for the Parents' Association and school attendance lists. However, they were accomplished enough at their craft to print more elaborate materials such as a school magazine that was illustrated with their own linoleum and wood cuts and contained stories submitted by all age groups at the school.

To replenish the dwindling stock of wooden toys at the school, the "twelves" became toymakers and concentrated their efforts on constructing those dolls and animals used extensively by the younger folks

in block-building and play. That venture, though fun and helpful to others, did not seem to hold the interest of the "twelves" nor did it serve as a catalyst for more generalized learning. Therefore, this group took on such jobs as weaving and the publication of *The Bookworm's Digest*, which contained book reviews written by the "twelves." The latter venture was extremely successful in promoting learning, especially in the areas of literature and in the study of language. However, throughout Pratt's tenure at the school, no particular job for the "twelves" had the sustaining interest so noticeable with the younger groups.

Although the "thirteens" demonstrated through the years an interest in all aspects of photographic work, especially for the purpose of documenting school activities, their primary thrust was preparation for high school. Typically, students, with faculty assistance, assessed their individual academic qualifications and concentrated their efforts on any remediation thought necessary to meet high school entrance requirements. As a parting gesture of appreciation to the City and Country School, the "thirteens" often selected a group project to improve the physical facilities.

Even though the children worked at their jobs for only short periods each day, Caroline Pratt valued greatly such activities because of their contributions to learning both academic content and social skills as well as developing a sense of personal responsibility. In her words:

Jobs as the core of an elementary-school curriculum have proved themselves to our satisfaction over and over again, and from every point of view. The absorption of children in their jobs, the way in which, like healthy plants, they throw roots out in every direction from the job to draw in ever more educational nourishment—in the practical skills, in geography and history, in literature and music and the arts—to us this is the surest confirmation that we have enlisted that potent and precious force, the child's urge to learn, in his education.³⁵

A Consideration of Theory

In a recent dissertation (1978) dealing with the work of Caroline Pratt, Maxine Hirsch called attention to Pratt's seeming aversion to concerns of educational theory.

Not only did Pratt fail to deliberate upon her educational theory, she tended to resist sharing any information to that end. When a student-teacher asked Pratt to define her own particular brand of educational practice, as exhibited by the City and Country School, Pratt flatly refused, and urged the student, instead, to observe for herself and draw her own conclusions.³⁶

Hirsch noted a'so that in Pratt's many publications, rarely are the names of educational theorists even mentioned, let alone their works critiqued. There certainly is evidence that she was quite familiar with the ideas of those educational thinkers who were her contemporaries, but there is no way to assess accurately the possible impact of their work on her approach.

The way that educational theory was avoided at the City and Country School stood in marked contrast to the rigorous testing of psychological and philosophical principles at Dewey's Laboratory School. This should in no way be interpreted to mean that Pratt and her staff were not interested in education as a field of legitimate study. Rather, they simply were not equipped to couch their ideas in general theoretical constructs amenable to testing through educational practice.

As an experimental school, the City and Country School did serve one essential research purpose, which was to promote systematic observation of children's behavior. From such observations, a set of fundamental beliefs about children evolved that has served to guide educational practice, particularly for younger children.

Child-centered progressivism represented more a disposition toward children than it did toward a specified methodology or a recommended curriculum; Pratt's contribution to educational theory was her firm belief that children are inherently creative and have a need and the ability to learn and give order to their own lives. Within this context her form of permissiveness seems perfectly justified, especially for early childhood education, which emphasizes an environment rich in those objects that can inspire learning through dramatic play, with the teacher in a non-directive role.

As the children got older, more direction was given, but the atmosphere always remained open and informal; and the pedagogical emphasis continued to be on positive reinforcement toward self-directed

learning. As Pratt's long-time friend and colleague Jean Murray has pointed out, it was not the number but the quality of experiences that counted.

As the curriculum at City and Country evolved, Caroline Pratt kept her eye on the things that gave children the deepest satisfactions, and by trial and error she and her staff gradually evolved the basic curricular structure which the school still practices today: give the children *experiences* that will fit their stage of development and that have inherent in them unlimited opportunities for learning—learning as all children do learn best, by involvement, by really needing new information, or a new skill, by using it and then going to further exploration.¹⁷

Caroline Pratt constantly emphasized that the specific activities and materials that worked so well at the City and Country School might not work in a different circumstance with different children. Her publications were meant to provide cues for others, but the hope was that her readers would themselves experiment, discover, and learn from children.

Contributions

Caroline Pratt's contribution to reforms in curriculum and methodology remains significant but pales in comparison to her efforts as an early champion of the rights of children. In an era in which it was especially difficult for a woman to be heard on issues of the day, Pratt forcefully and eloquently spoke out on behalf of children, whom she considered disenfranchised. In her view, among those most in need of basic rights were the children. Although children's basic rights have not yet all been fulfilled, she has raised our level of consciousness regarding their needs. This is her legacy.

Update

That the City and Country School continues to function in a way that is still congruent with Caroline Pratt's fundamental approach is remarkable, given the usual short life-span of private experimental schools. The school remains, as it was in its earliest days, a teacher cooperative with teachers serving on the board of trustees. The staff consists of a teacher for each age group, specialists in art, library,

rhythms, science, music, woodworking, a nurse, consultant psychologist, assistants, and student teachers. Jobs continue to be a central feature of the curriculum; and the formal teaching of reading is still delayed until the "sevens." With a few exceptions, textbooks are not assigned. "The Library is Our Textbook" is now a popular school slogan.³⁸

Some slight changes are apparent. The student body now comes from outside the immediate neighborhood and is ethnically and racially diverse. The job of the "twelves" presently is to work in a number of ways with the "fours." Upon graduation, the students typically enter those private and public high schools with demanding academic programs. There is a new after-school program with a mixed age group of three- to eight-year-olds. An alumni association has also been formed.

That the program at the City and Country School has remained with few changes suggests that it now represents an alternative school more than an educational experiment. However, it still commands, and rightly so, public attention. As recently as May 18, 1979, the Borough of Manhattan officially celebrated a "City and Country School Day." The proclamation was in recognition of the historical significance of the school—surely a tribute to Caroline Pratt.

The Holtville School

Twenty-seven miles northwest of Montgomery, Alabama, in Elmore County stands the white stucco, Spanish-styled, consolidated Holtville School. The school sits in the center of what was, during the Depression years, one of the most economically destitute counties in Alabama. As the Depression began, there were no paved roads in the Holtville community, no telephones, no water system, and no indoor toilets. There were few industries except for small farms, and the land was red clay and poor. "In their eroded fields farmers raised little but weevil-infested cotton, scrawny chickens, and razor-backed hogs. Their wives perspired over hot wood stoves and set unvarying suppers of corn pone, fatback, and hominy grits."⁹ Hookworm infection was rampant and there was widespread whooping cough, pellagra, and measles. The sparse population was politically, socially, and religiously conservative. It was in this setting that Holtville School with approximately 500 students and 18 faculty became one of the nation's most innovative and well-known progressive schools.

Initially, the innovative changes at the Holtville School began hesitantly and without benefit of any coherent philosophy of education. Doing new things and doing old things in new ways began in response to specific and immediate needs, both in the school and in the community. Although a few professional journals dealt with both the theory and the innovative practices at Holtville, its fame came primarily through coverage of its program by the popular press.

What the popular press reported was uniformly positive. According to *The Reader's Digest*, "... the surplus energy of young people has been harnessed into a powerful engine vitalizing the whole commun-

ity."⁴⁰ *The Rotarian* claimed "... there's a new spirit in Holtville ... the boys and girls ... know it's a prosperous, upstanding community because they've made it that way themselves."⁴¹ *Life* magazine published a four-page spread on Holtville High School, labeling it as a place that "... has completely taken a lead in all community life by making the community a better, richer place in which to live."⁴² The federal government was so impressed with the program that the State Department's Office of Education filmed "The Story of Holtville," and translated it into 12 languages for distribution in 22 countries in Europe and South America as part of the U.S. Cultural and Information Program.⁴³ Through the popular media, Holtville attained a fame and acceptance not enjoyed by other experimental progressive schools of that era.

The Background for Change

The Holtville School was marked for distinction even before anyone thought of changing the program. A new school building was needed in the mid-1920's, and the county superintendent of education and the local board of education requested the counsel of A. F. Harmon, Alabama State Superintendent of Education. On a tour of the school facilities, Harmon took his walking cane and traced in the sand a design of a school he had seen and admired on a trip he had taken to California. Two architects were present, and they transferred the design to paper. Construction began soon after that meeting, and the building was completed in 1929.

There was a striking incongruity between the new building and the surrounding home dwellings. In describing the community of Holtville in that era, Blake Clark noted, "Its unpainted frame houses were spotted with black where weather-beaten boards had rotted. Dirt yards were dusty in summer and muddy in winter. The inevitable Chic Sale retreat leaned in the corner of the barn lot."⁴⁴ In the midst of that stood the new school—pure white stucco and of Spanish design. The large central auditorium had arched windows and large front columns and was connected to wings on either side by breezeways. One wing housed the elementary grades and the other the high school classrooms. Architecturally, each wing was a smaller version of the central auditorium.

Decorations of brown and green tile graced the front of the building. With this attractive new building, it is easy to see why the school became the center for community activity.

One year before the building was completed, two men were hired who would prove to be critical to the development of Holtville as a progressive school. Historically, the success of progressive schools seemed to depend on certain personalities. For Holtville, it was James Chrietzberg, the principal, and John Formby, the vocational agriculture teacher. Each demonstrated remarkable dedication to a community-school concept and, by the strength of their personalities, fashioned a progressive program in a stronghold of political, social, and religious conservatism.

Ideologically, the Holtville experiment anticipated by several years the life-adjustment education movement of the post World War II period. The central features of life-adjustment education on which Holtville concentrated were community involvement in school affairs, supervised programs of work experience for most high school students, and functional experiences in the areas of practical arts, home and family life, and health and physical fitness.



Source: *The Story of Holtville*

James Chrietzberg (L.) and John Formby discuss plans for the experiment at the Holtville School

Agricultural Education: The Catalyst for Change

John Forney arrived at Holtville in 1928 after completing his studies at Alabama Polytechnic Institute (now Auburn University). He immediately conducted a survey to determine local needs in order to determine how the school might best serve the community. Oats was a Holtville crop that had to be used locally for feed rather than being marketed because no thresher was available. Through the Farm Security Administration the school obtained a loan and purchased a thresher. The vocational agriculture students used the machine both as a learning experience and as a service to the local farmers. The small fee charged for the service was used to repay the loan. The students learned, the farmers profited, and the school made money with which to purchase other equipment. Thereby began a most incredible development where a school would become not only the center of activity in a community but also a major industry for the community.

Farmers around Holtville were losing 25% of the meat they slaugh-



Source: *The Story of Holtville*

Students at work in the Holtville refrigeration plant

tered because of inadequate processing. The school built the first refrigeration plant, quick freeze room, and locker storage in the area. Alternative ways of preserving meat were also available to the farmers through the school. Mr. Formby noted that the services provided were thorough: "We would kill the hog, chill him out, cut him up, cure him, smoke the meat and give the product back to the farmer here as a finished product."⁴⁵ In one year, the students handled about 95,000 pounds of pork and 6,000 pounds of beef, serving 655 customers.

In a typical month, the boys would spray 5,000 orchard trees with a school-owned power sprayer, contour plow 100 acres of farm land with three school-owned tractors, and hatch and sell over 3,000 chicks from the school-owned hatchery. The girls, under the supervision of the home economics teacher, Mrs. Marguerite Holt, ran a fully functioning cannery plant that had been scavenged from a defunct federal relief project. They were able to process over 10,000 cans of meat, fruits, and vegetables in a summer. Other profitable community services that doubled as vocational training included a school barber shop, a beauty parlor, a farm repair shop, a print shop, and electrical wiring done on contract. In the science classes, the students developed, packaged, and marketed hand cream, toothpowder, and varnish remover. A community recreational center at the school included such popular activities as bowling on a student-constructed alley and a student-operated movie. These and other profitable ventures required the establishment of a student-run bank that would transact up to \$750 per day.⁴⁶

These projects were intended as learning experiences and vocational training; they also provided sufficient monetary return for the purchase of school equipment and other materials, but not enough for the needs of a school that provided extensive community services requiring expensive equipment or for a construction program that eventually came to be a ten-building campus. To support such projects, the administration and faculty zealously pursued sources of funding. Obviously, some monies came from state and county appropriations. Further, the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools provided assistance. But Holtville pressed beyond these usual sources to find what they needed. For example, the school initiated several projects jointly with the National Youth Administration; these

efforts paid off not only in programs and materials but also in substantial on-campus construction. The school sought aid from a number of federal agricultural programs, and loans were obtained from the Federal Security Administration at 3% interest. As the following vignette illustrates, obtaining materials could require considerable grit and tenacity.

Lister Hill, U.S. Senator from Alabama, had successfully introduced a bill in Congress that allowed army surplus materials to be donated to schools. Mr. Formby repeatedly visited area army bases in hopes of getting vocational equipment and was repeatedly turned away, in some cases without even making it past the post gate. He reported this to a community resource group, and they promptly bought him a train ticket to Washington, D.C. His best contact was Senator Hill himself, who was chagrined when he found out that people from his own state were not being assisted by his bill. He sent Mr. Formby directly to the Chief of Staff of the United States Army, who personally called the Chief of Staff of the Army Headquarters in Atlanta to say that he was sending a gentleman from Holtville, Alabama, for the purpose of obtaining surplus equipment, and he added a little testily for emphasis, "If you don't have what he wants, you help him find it."⁴⁷

When Mr. Formby arrived in Atlanta, the army staff was, in his words, "looking for him." The initial contact produced four large tractor-trailer loads of equipment. The school eventually received, under the provisions of the bill, a brand new crankshaft grinding machine, 12 gas-driven electric welders, and 14 electric-driven electric welders. For building dams, fish ponds, and watering holes, they obtained two draglines, an angledozer, a bulldozer, ditching machine, road patrol, and a large tractor-trailer for transportation of the earth-moving equipment. Such enterprising ways resulted in a school that was able to provide a poverty-ridden community the services of its youth, using equipment that in the 1940s was valued at half a million dollars.⁴⁸

All activities noted thus far were associated with vocational education. Impressive as they were, they certainly were not sufficient to warrant giving Holtville a label as a progressive or a life-adjustment

school. In fact, until the late 1930s the Holtville School could not really be called a progressive school. There were regular classroom tests, subject-centered teaching, standardized examinations, report cards, letter grades, and a highly structured school schedule. The turning point of Holtville's commitment to progressive education came in 1938, when the faculty initiated broad-based curriculum reform. However, the environment for reform had been nurtured throughout the decade. Namely, the faculty under Chrietzberg had gained the confidence of the community; the beauty and spaciousness of the physical plant itself encouraged a community-school concept; the vocational education efforts had received a good press; and the community took pride in such notoriety and hoped it would continue. People in Holtville had grown comfortable with the idea that the educational program could directly affect the physical conditions and the lifestyle of the community. Most important, members of the community had grown accustomed to the idea of educational change. But the event that sparked curriculum reform in 1938 was the invitation to the Holtville School to participate in an experimental project under the auspices of the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools.

The Southern Study

The Southern Study, formally titled the Southern Association Study in Secondary Schools and Colleges, was the work of the Commission on Curricular Problems and Research, a body established in 1935 by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. Although progressive curriculum reform on a statewide basis had been going on in the South since 1929, no large-scale, controlled experimentation had been coordinated on a regional level.⁴⁹ Some southern educators had been irritated because the South was not represented in the influential Eight-Year Study. The Southern Study was, to some extent, an attempt to rectify that omission. A number of Eight-Year Study personnel were used in a variety of ways, and the successes and failures of the Eight-Year Study were constantly monitored to the advantage of the Southern Study.⁵⁰ Although the Southern Study eventually deviated from the format of the Eight-Year Study, the similarities were substantial.

The Commission on Curricular Problems and Research selected 33 southern schools to participate in the study and began its work in 1938. For the faculties and schools involved, the Commission supplied financial assistance, expertise for workshops and conferences, scholarships and grants-in-aid, on-site consulting, and summer programs at southern higher education institutions. Each school was expected to create its own unique program of reform. In the summer of 1938, James Christyberg, along with three of his teachers, attended a six-week Southern Study workshop at Vanderbilt University. Thus began a formal commitment to progressive reform at Holtville.

Over a period of time and after a great deal of committee and individual study, the Holtville faculty concluded that:

personality growth and development, health and physical development, economic well-being, the ability to solve the many commonplace problems around the school, in the home, and the community and similar problems should be the real aims of education.³¹

With the precedent set by the vocational education efforts prior to 1938, the progressive orientation continued throughout the 1940s with a focus on using the school to improve the physical, economic, social, and recreational conditions in the community.

With the assistance of Southern Association consultants, summer workshops for the faculty, and help from the state college at Auburn, the Holtville staff developed a secondary school curriculum that was at that time unique, radically progressive, and highly individualized. Students, with parental assistance, selected a vocational or a more general goal that became the focal point for their learning, and all their courses were pointed at it. Depending on their goals, the students were matched with an appropriate faculty advisor, who would guide them through their program.³²

During the latter part of the school year, the students worked closely with their advisors to develop a plan of study for the next year. Keeping in mind the students' general goals and previous skills attained, the advisors and students refined their plans, and when school resumed in September, plans were solidified for the specific organized groups and activities in which the individual would participate. By 1943, there were 119 different groups and activities, ranging from the traditional

algebra, chemistry, and Spanish to the more nontraditional gardening, sewing, and salesmanship groups.

The school day was organized around four, 90-minute blocks. This arrangement gave some basic structure for planning, but the blocks lasted long enough to allow for a great deal of flexible scheduling of individual programs. Each day the student planned specific activities for those blocks of time to meet both intermediate as well as long-range goals.

In the home room, the teacher examined each student's plans, helping to see that he had a balanced day if at all possible—some indoor work, some outdoor work; a certain amount of study, something requiring the use of the hands; some individual work, some group work; a reasonable amount of play; some service to other people, some work on personal goals.⁵¹

Wherever possible, attempts were made to integrate activities. For example, developing the student's plan of study was used as an exercise in writing skills; and the document was checked carefully by an English teacher. This procedure was also used with project proposals, whether group or individual. In the area of mathematics, the actual problems that boys encountered in their farming efforts required computational skills that made learning mathematics a real life activity. Home economics students planned and prepared well-balanced meals based on principles of good nutrition and thus improved the diets of families in the community. Whenever possible, subject matter was learned through working on actual life problems.

One problem faced by every progressive school was student evaluation. The traditional practice of giving letter grades was incompatible with the entire progressive mode of the Holtville School. Therefore, a system of reporting was devised in which each student completed a written self-evaluation approximately every six weeks. This report included a statement of aims in terms of personality growth, social learning, and academic learning along with an itemized account of the student's accomplishments. The report was included in a folder containing samples of the student's work and a detailed written evaluation by the teachers. The folder was shared with the parents and peers who were themselves encouraged to enter comments. Further, provisions were made for program and faculty evaluations by the students.

As was the case with the Eight-Year Study, the college-bound student from Holtville did not seem to be hampered academically by the flexible schedules, self-directed learning, and integration of subject matter. Of course, the sample size from Holtville was too small to infer any substantive conclusions. (For example, the class of 1942 had only six out of 62 graduates go on to college.³⁴) However, those who did go to college during the years of the Southern Study did extremely well. Discussing that era, Blake Clark noted that "A comparative record of Alabama high school graduates in various colleges shows that Holtville High boys and girls were first one year, and always rank in the top quarter."³⁵ Further, Chrietzberg, the Holtville principal, reported that standard achievement and ability test scores were not negatively affected by the switch to progressive techniques.³⁶

Holtville was at its peak as an innovative and progressive school when the Southern Study ended in 1944. The school had achieved national acclaim, and the community that supported it had itself been revitalized. A beautification program, initiated and sustained by the students, had given the homes and yards a new and brighter look. Agricultural education and home economics had radically changed the diets provided in the homes and the earning power of local farms. School health and dental services also positively affected the physical well-being of Holtville students. The school was the center for community recreation. Most important, students were given substantial responsibility for directing their own education, which, in the case of Holtville, was organized around the world of work.

The Holtville School could have served as a model for the life-adjustment education movement that developed in the late 1940s. Ironically, the experimental programs at Holtville were slowly being dismantled as life-adjustment education was gaining momentum in the rest of the nation.

From the Experimental to the Conventional

Frederick Redefer reported in his dissertation, "The Eight-Year Study—Eight Years Later," that little remained of any experimental programs in all 30 high schools that had participated in that monumental evaluation project.³⁷ Progressive schools in the 1930s generally

had a way of returning to the conventional. Holtville was to be no exception. Some of the factors that contributed to the decline of its experimental program were common to those that led to the decline of the progressive education movement nationally. Other factors were unique to the Holtville experience.

Two devastating fires played a major role in crippling the Holtville School's service to the community. The first fire occurred in 1945, destroying the refrigeration plant, hatchery, canning plant, dehydration plant, printing press, and darkroom. Damage was estimated at \$75,000, and the school had no insurance against such a loss.⁵⁸ With borrowed money the facilities were rebuilt and a fire engine purchased. In 1949 a fire started in the wood shop, spread to the machine shop, the automobile mechanic shop, the quick freeze plant, the canning plant, and the grist mill. The estimated damage this time was \$250,000.⁵⁹ The ultimate irony was that the fire engine stood outside the building that housed the automobile mechanic shop and was itself burned. Again, some rebuilding was done, but it was that second fire, according to Mr. Formby, that disabled the vocational aspects of the program in a substantial way.⁶⁰ Further, small businesses were developing in Elmore County, which lessened the need for the school's involvement in certain service areas. Some of these service activities that were begun as a part of the school program were sold to private ownership, e.g., a wood-working plant that provided 45 jobs in the community.⁶¹

It is clear also that there was never any intention of sustaining all of the innovations adopted during the period of the Southern Study. Chrietzberg's daughter, Mrs. Florence Abrams, stressed that it was an experimental study. She also pointed out that over the years the easy access to military equipment and materials for the schools was no longer available.⁶² Further, many of the experimental programs did not meet the Alabama State Department of Education regulations. To its credit, the state education department did release Holtville from many requirements during the period of the Southern Study, but these special arrangements, which had allowed Holtville tremendous latitude for experimentation, could not be continued indefinitely.⁶³

Many of the teachers in the 1930s and 1940s were single and boarded out in the community or lived in the teacherage on the school grounds.

As Mrs. Abrams pointed out, the school and the community were the chief concerns, and they were willing to focus all their time and energy on the experimental program.⁸⁴ But the teaching profession was changing after World War II in such a way that such singularity of purpose, even in rural settings, was no longer typical.

The national conservative swing in the 1950s extended to the state of Alabama, and that may have been the most significant factor affecting the decline of the experimental program at Holtville. In Alabama, the conservative reaction coalesced in an election of a new state superintendent of education.

W. J. Terry rode the crest of the conservative swing and campaigned for the state superintendency on the promise to return the schools to quality education of former times when education meant the development of the intellect through the subject matter disciplines. Though he avoided the typical polemics against progressive education, his message was clear and his campaign successful. He became Alabama's State Superintendent of Education in 1951.⁸⁵

Key personnel that had supported progressive programs left the state department of education. A new state course of study, reflecting an extremely conservative philosophy of education, was adopted. There was an influx of people into Elmore County in the 1950s who strongly supported the conservative swing that was evident statewide. Countywide, the lay public's expectation for the school was less for vocational programs and more for young people learning the basics.⁸⁶

By the time Chrietzberg retired in 1959, the school that he had led to national acclaim for its radical innovations had settled into a rather conventional mode with a fairly conservative curriculum. He did not find this disillusioning; he had started the experimental program as a response to the needs of the local community, but when his community became conservative, he accepted the mandate since he believed in the principle of local control.

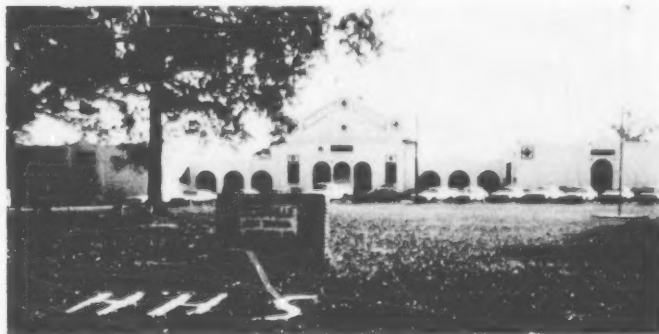
Update

The Holtville School today stands as a remarkable structure in what is still a very rural Alabama county. The main building has recently been added to the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage, so

funds may now be available for much-needed repairs. More important, such registration insures preservation. In spite of the advantages of new school plants with their modular designs, open spaces, and movable walls, there is something very special about a building with solid brass thresholds, arched 16-paned windows, high ceilings, wainscoting, and creaky hardwood floors.

Demographic changes in the Holtville community show a decreasing proportion of families who make their living solely by farming. People who work in Montgomery and even Birmingham are moving to the county to escape the city. Many have built on lake property provided by the back waters of Lake Jordan Dam. This migration has brought social and economic heterogeneity to the community and a diversity of lifestyles and value systems.

The school continues to serve grades one through twelve, with slightly more than 1,000 students enrolled. There is a single track curriculum, and the only vocational programs are elective courses in vocational home economics, industrial arts, and agriculture. The school is still used as a meeting place for community organizations. Unfortunately but unavoidably, the central auditorium was turned into classroom space some years ago, and this arrangement has substantially curbed the kinds of programs that the school can accommodate. However, with the construction of a new elementary school in 1980, more



Source: William B. Landoltale

The Holtville School in 1979

space is available, and the central auditorium is being restored. According to the current principal, William Earnest, the auditorium will once again provide the type of meeting space to establish strong bonds between community and school.

The most obvious and significant change from the progressive era is that the student body is now 21% black, but there appears to be no racial tension. All of the students see the film, "The Story of Holtville," and a substantial number of the white children can identify relatives and other members of the community who had roles in the film. Through the film and from their parents, many students have come to know that the Holtville School has an important heritage. The students appear unusually relaxed, pleasant, and considerate. They smile and speak to strangers and perform those simple courtesies that one no longer expects from young people. It is only speculation, but perhaps their gracious behavior is a reflection of their pride in the school's remarkable history.

Lessons from the Past

The three schools profiled here made significant contributions to the thought and practice of progressive education in this nation. The documentation of those contributions in this fastback is meant in no way to imply that the records of the three schools were unblemished. They had their faults, the most serious being sins of omission. For example, their leaders openly protested oppressive conditions in the schools while at times ignoring the oppressive social conditions in which the students were growing up. However, the extraordinary commitment to educational change on behalf of the young people represented by these three schools deserves not only to be remembered but to be celebrated.

For John Dewey and his staff, the commitment took the form of an experiment to test certain philosophical and psychological principles—not as some vacuous academic exercise, but rather as an honest search to discover more effective and humane ways of educating children. For Caroline Pratt also, the commitment took the form of an experiment—one less theoretical than Dewey's but no less intent on learning—that would contribute to the well-being of children. At Holtville, the commitment was to abolish, through a community-school concept, the incredible waste of human and natural resources brought on by poverty and ignorance.

There were a number of factions within the progressive education movement; the experimentalist orientation at The Laboratory School, the child-centered approach at City and Country, and life-adjustment education at Holtville represented three of the major ones. Differences aside, the three schools merged ideologically precisely on those issues that defined progressivism as a movement. Although their practices varied greatly, they stood as one in their commitment to progressive principles. Their students were free to participate in decisions that affected them, to plan many of their own learning activities, and to

move about freely in the performance of their work. Programs were highly individualized, and the relations between teachers and students were informal and based on mutual trust. A cooperative rather than a competitive atmosphere prevailed. Attending to the health and physical well-being of the students was a central feature at each school. Student evaluations were multi-dimensional and used solely as diagnostic tools rather than instruments for rating performance. Student interests were honored and felt needs accommodated, not as ends in themselves but as springboards for learning.

Also very important, vocational concerns were crucial and integral parts of each program. Dewey used "occupations" as a theme to give young people insight into their cultural heritage and to provide them with a rich perspective on how man has historically confronted and solved problems. Caroline Pratt used "jobs" as the core of her curriculum. The faculty at Holiville identified work for community improvement as their unifying motif. Although their approaches varied, each school was committed to vocational concerns as a salient feature of the curriculum.

In spite of their divergence in theory and practice, the principles shared by the three schools were fundamental to their programs and were distinctly progressive. Many of those principles then thought to be radical have become conventional wisdom in contemporary educational thought. The progressives set a precedent for classroom innovation by redefining the purposes of education, diversifying the curriculum, changing the roles of teachers and students, and altering the very atmosphere of the school.

There are any number of lessons to be learned from the faculties of these three schools. One of the most important was not so much with their efforts on behalf of students but with the possibilities they revealed for teachers. It is impossible to read their books and articles, to peruse their lesson plans and reports, or to interview them without capturing their sense of excitement as they undertook their various experiments. The extra work, the specter of failure, and the attacks from critics were all easily offset by the daily challenges of knowing what they were doing was right for children and youth. In their attempts to help others, they were themselves richly rewarded.

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- Story of Holtville" were printed also in *Alabama Journal* and *Montgomery Advertiser* in 1947-1948. The film was made during October and November 1947 by the International Motion Picture Division, Office of Education and Information, State Department, Washington, D.C. A print of the film, not for distribution, is housed at the Holtville School.
44. Clark, "Know-How at Holtville," p. 17.
 45. Taken from a tape recording of the author's interview with Mr. John Formby in Holtville, Alabama, 20 March 1978.
 46. Whilden Wallace, James Christberg and Verner M. Sims, *The Story of Holtville* (Deatsville, Alabama: Holtville High School Press, 1944), p. 150. This paperbound book is a narrative account of what happened at Holtville during the experimental years, written in story form and using data from a 1942 Faculty Report to the Director of the Southern Study. The authors felt that the Faculty Report was too technical and they wanted to tell the Holtville story in a more readable fashion.
 47. Formby interview, 20 March 1978.
 48. *Ibid.*
 49. Frank Jenkins et al., "Coöperative Study for the Improvement of Education," *Southern Association Quarterly* 16 (February 1946): 12.
 50. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
 51. James Christberg, "A Rural High School and its Community," *Southern Association Quarterly*, vol. 3, no. 3 (August 1939): 469.
 52. Milbrey Frazer Covert, "A Report on: Holtville," *Southern Agriculturist* (January 1948): 19.
 53. Wallace, Christberg, and Sims, *Story of Holtville*, p. 63.
 54. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
 55. Blake Clark, "Holtville Youth Leads the Way," *Readers Digest* (June 1946): 68.
 56. Wallace, Christberg, and Sims, *Story of Holtville*, p. 76.
 57. Crenin, *The Transformation of the School*, p. 256.
 58. Covert, "A Report on Holtville," *Southern Agriculturist* (January 1948): 256.
 59. "Famous Holtville High is Burned," *Birmingham Post*, 12 May 1949, p. 1.
 60. Formby interview, 20 March 1978.
 61. The film of "The Story of Holtville," *Montgomery Advertiser*.
 62. Taken from a tape recording of the author's interview with Mrs. Florence Abrams in Montgomery, Alabama, 21 February 1978.
 63. The film of "The Story of Holtville," *Montgomery Advertiser*.
 64. Abrams interview, 21 February 1978.
 65. William B. Lauderdale, "A Progressive Era for Education in Alabama (1935-1951)," *The Alabama Historical Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 1 (Spring 1975): 61.
 66. Taken from a tape recording of the author's interview with William Earnest, the present principal of the Holtville School, in Holtville, Alabama, 20 March 1978.